A Reason to Mourn by big_slug

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Summary:

When did Lonnie Byers last show interest in his sons? No one really remembers. Then why does he appear out of the blue a year after their move from Hawkins?

You should read the first work in the series to fully understand.

1. Chapter 1

Notes for the Chapter:

> Yay, a new multi chapter fic in this universe!
> This is one I've really been looking forward to.

September 1986

tap... tap tap... tap tap tap... tap tap tap tap...

Immense satisfaction radiates from the pit of Will‘s stomach as he watches the dark gray sky send down the first raindrops of this lazy Thursday afternoon. The perfect slow, long ending to an uneventful day in September, no homework, no chores, just him, his boyfriend and a tangle of bed sheets. Maybe a bit of faint music from El‘s room and some giggling from her and Melissa.

It‘s not quite weekend, but it sure feels like it. So, cups of tea having turned cold on Will‘s nightstand, he thinks the entire world can just suck it today. If he could live out his days like this, he‘d be happy to do so. Eternal goosebumps from Adrian‘s hot breath tickling his neck? Yes, please.

Only, things sometimes take an unexpected turn. If someone were to tell Will that only three minutes from now he will be pacing, heart in his throat, nervously fumbling with the telephone cord, he wouldn‘t believe a word of that. The doorbell chimes unpleasantly through the house and up the stairs. And Will just groans, closing his eyes.

„Shit...“

„Don‘t.“ Adrian says, pulling him back when he makes an attempt at getting up. „El is gonna get it.“

Will lies back down to listen. Another ring. Then another. And the music from El‘s room doesn‘t stop or quiet down a bit. „No, she‘s not.“ he replies. „Look, it could be something important. I‘m gonna be right back.“

This time, Adrian lets Will scoot away from him, still with some resistance in the form of a hand gripping his side. „Gonna be right back.“ Will repeats. „Seriously.“ The ringing of the bell is growing more frantic, and although Will would like to do nothing more than to follow Adrian‘s grabby-handed invitation and get back into bed, he can‘t shed the eerie feeling that it is, in fact, important.

He scrambles down the stairs without checking himself in the mirror, though he knows that his shirt is a bit of a loose fit, and that right on his collarbone sits a darkening spot that Adrian has sucked into his skin earlier. No point in hiding it.

„Coming!“ Will shouts at another wave of rings. Few people would actually be so persistent. Will can‘t name one. With an exasperated sigh, he yanks the door open. For just a split second, Will gawks at the man in front of him, his heart making a rapid fall through his body. He is somewhat hard to recognize, thinner than Will has ever seen him and with brittle hair, but it‘s *him*.

The grin on his father‘s way too hollow face is unsettling. „Missed me?“

Without wasting a second, without thinking, Will slams the door shut. Utter panic, irrational and mind-blurring, washes over him from head to toe. „Oh, come on!“ Lonnie shouts from outside. „It‘s raining! What, you just wanna leave your own father standing here?“

Exactly that, Will thinks. He knows he has, realistically, nothing to fear from dad. At least not physically. A barking dog at best, and Will thinks he is long over all the comments and mockery. But he is still not letting this man into the house. Will makes a beeline for the kitchen instead, relieved that dad doesn‘t even try ringing the doorbell again. The last thing he needs is Adrian coming downstairs.

Will‘s fingers tremble as he dials the number, and he has to start over twice because of it. „Come on, come on...“ he utters. „Come on!“

„Homeport Souvenirs, this is Martha speaking, how can I help you?“

„Hi, uh, Martha. It‘s Will. Byers.“

„Will, hi! I haven‘t heard from you for a while, do you want to-“

„Yeah, I need to speak to my mom right now! It‘s important!“ If Will sounds rude, mom‘s coworker stays understanding. It might be his frantic tone.

„I‘ll get her on the phone.“

„Come on… come on…“ Will repeats when all he can hear is footsteps and then silence for a while. Silence from all directions, so Will spies into the hall to find that the looming shadow in the tiny, blurred windows around the door is now gone. A quick glance out of the kitchen window reveals dad‘s Oldsmobile parked by the curb.

„Will?“

He had almost lowered the phone, but mom‘s voice drags him back to reality. „Yeah, mom, I‘m here!“ he says, out of breath.

„Sweetie, what‘s wrong? Martha said it‘s urgent? No one‘s hurt, right?“

„Mom, it‘s- it‘s dad. He‘s here. I mean, I didn‘t let him in, but… how did he find us? Did you ever give him our new address?“

„Dad, as in-?“ Mom trails off. *„Wait, he‘s at our house right now?“*

„Yes!“ Will throws an arm in the air. „But he‘s outside in his car and I‘m not gonna let him in.“

„And you‘re sure it‘s him, sweetie?“

„Jeez, I‘m sure, mom!“ He isn‘t really as angry as he sounds, just scared out of his mind. „Should he have any idea where we live

now?“

„N-No, I just wanted to give him our new number, but didn‘t get through back when we moved. Sweetie, just stay put. I‘m on my way. Stay inside.“

There isn‘t a word of goodbye, but she‘s going to be here in ten minutes tops. Will darts past the front door and up the stairs again, to find Adrian lounging in his bed as though nothing had happened. „Are you done? Gym really got the best of me today. I‘m sore all over.“

„S-Sorry.“ Will says. „I can‘t-“

Somehow, Adrian sheds the teasing demeanor in the blink of an eye. „Will, what‘s wrong? Who was at the door.“

„We better not go downstairs for now. My dad is out there.“

Adrian makes a face, somewhere between confusion and fear. He knows enough about Will‘s dad to be justified in that. „We better tell the girls, huh?“

Notes for the Chapter:

> I don't think I've ever written Lonnie before. This is gonna be interesting.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

> Few questions answered in this chapter. So stay tuned. And don't worry, there's gonna be fluff too. Soft, gay fluff.

Will stays by the kitchen window to watch the scene, phone in hand, though he is sure he wouldn‘t call the cops; If dad should try anything, he‘d run outside and beat the living shit out of him. Currently, he is just yelling. Yelling at mom in the rain. Adrian, Melissa and El all grimace, making their discomfort evident. They can‘t hear a thing from outside other than the rain thrumming. But the argument is heated, both adults‘ gestures growing more and more threatening, with dad pacing.

Finally, Will‘s dad spins around on the spot, and Will makes a half-jump for the window, fearing this is the moment that he hits her. But dad just speaks. He runs his fingers through what‘s left of his hair. And whatever he says, it‘s neither spoken in an aggressive tone, nor is it shouted. When she is angry, Will‘s mom - who isn‘t a tall person by any standard - seems to grow a few inches. Now, Will can see her shrinking and clasping a hand in front of her mouth.

Dad looks at his shoes, kicking wet gravel, hands in his pockets, but semi-aggressively shrugs her hand off when she reaches for his shoulder. Mom lets it sink. She looks defeated.

„What‘s going on?“ Will murmurs. „This isn‘t right.“

„I mean, they‘re not fighting anymore.“ Melissa remarks. „That‘s a good thing, isn‘t it?“

„I don‘t know. Doesn‘t look good.“ Will says. He returns his gaze to the window just in time to watch mom pull out a ball pen and a notebook from her purse. With these in hand, she leans into dad‘s car and scribbles something down. After that, they don‘t exchange many more words. Formalities and phrases, judging from the looks of it. Which is odd. Will has never in his life heard either of them say so much as *hello*, or *goodbye* to the other. They barely acknowledged each others‘ presence back when dad still lived with them.

He drives off then, engine screaming over the rain, tires splashing water over the sidewalk. And mom trots towards the door. Coming inside, she looks nothing but confused. Standing in the kitchen door, parka dripping all over the floor, she gawks at the assembly of kids.

„I‘m just gonna-“ Will reaches out to help her out of her jacket. Taking it off apparently didn‘t occur to her.

„Thank you, sweetie.“ she says absently. „It‘s... it‘s okay.“

„Mom, what did he want?“ Will presses, too upset to be all that considerate. „How did he even find us?“

„Y-You kids watch some TV while I find out.“ mom says quietly, but it‘s not a suggestion, and she is stronger than one would think when she leads Will out of the kitchen and to the living room, where she switches on the TV. The others have no choice but to follow. There is no further attempt to stop them from listening, though.

Mom talks quietly, so Will picks up shreds of her conversation at best. „Karen, hi, it‘s... yes... fine, thank you... say, do you happen to know... yes, he‘s here...“ and so on and so on. „Yeah, I‘ll wait.“

„Karen is Mike‘s mom.“ Will explains to Adrian and Melissa for some context. Having only met his friends for a few weeks in the summer, they would be forgiven for being clueless about their lives. „She‘s great, really. She wouldn‘t tell my dad where we moved. She knows him.“

„And what if-“ Adrian doesn‘t get to finish because Melissa clasps a hand across his mouth to shut him up.

Will‘s mom has just raised her voice in the kitchen. „No, no, Karen, listen! It‘s okay, really. Don‘t make a fuss about it. I don‘t wanna be any trouble, I just wanted to know! Under the circumstances, I‘m glad Ted told him.“ A pause. „Later. I‘m sorry, but I‘ll... I‘ll call you later, Karen.“

„Mom?“ Will carefully calls once he is sure she has hung up the phone. He taps into the kitchen again. He at least believes he has understood how this whole situation could develop.

„Sweetie, I‘m so sorry.“ Mom looks more composed now. She pulls Will in for a short hug. „Don‘t worry, you did the right thing calling me. Looks like Ted told your father where we live now and didn‘t think anything of it. You know how he is, I mean he‘s-“

„Mom, what about dad? Why is he even here? Why now, after a whole year?“

„I‘d-“ Mom clears her throat. „I‘d have to call Jonathan first. He‘s got to come up here.“

„Tonight? But he‘s gonna miss a day of classes.“

„I want to explain this to both of you. But you‘re right. It‘d be okay if he could only make it tomorrow. A day more or less won‘t hurt.“

Jonathan would have come home this weekend anyways, seeing as he spends basically every other weekend with the family. It‘s still a two hour drive from the city, so every week would be excessive. Plus with Nancy having transferred to NYU to live with him, they probably want some days off to themselves. Something Will tries not to think about too much. But he likes their bi-monthly visits. Nancy always brings news from the Wheeler family.

Will must look at least somewhat pleading, so mom continues „If he can‘t come home tonight, I won‘t leave you hanging, okay? I‘d just much rather have you both here for this. You could...“

„I could... what?“

Mom heaves a sigh, fidgeting with her hands. „You know that Melissa and Adrian are always welcome here, but right now they should maybe, you know. I‘m just saying we have to talk about family matters tonight, and they could be uncomfortable with it.“

„They‘ll understand. How about you call Jonathan while El and I take them home?“

This earns Will a relieved smile from mom and a kiss to the cheek, to which he responds with a grimace of mock disgust. „Mom, we‘re... we‘re gonna be fine, right? He‘s not trying to-“

„Will, I‘ve given him the address to the motel on Edison Street.“

Will nods. That‘s all he needs to know to feel safe.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

> Why am I so productive today? I guess I just wanted to get this reveal out there to you lovely people as fast as possible.

„There they are. Let‘s go downstairs, huh?“

They have spent the last two and a half hours in El‘s room, seated on the bench by her windowsill. There the two of them just watched the September sky darkening, they listened to the steady shower of raindrops it let loose. And they waited for Jonathan‘s car to pull up in front of the house. According to him, he could come if it‘s an emergency - A day of classes is *‚nothing I can‘t catch up with.‘*

Nancy walks up to the door with Jonathan, hand in hand, but lets go to wrap El in a tight embrace. To say they get along would be an understatement; Nancy is, in a way, El‘s connection with Hawkins, and her connection with Mike. Living, breathing proof that he isn‘t *that* far away. Will enjoys having her around as well. Mom, having waited in the living room with a smoke, greets her next.

„Are you sure you‘re okay with me being here tonight?“ Nancy asks her. „It really sounded like you have some family matters to talk about and I could-“

„You make yourself comfortable, Nancy. I could never ask Jonathan to leave you alone in the city like that.“

Nancy, biting her lip, nods. Then, turning to El, she asks „Wanna go upstairs and give them a little time alone?“

Mom looks grateful for that, since she never would have asked Nancy to leave. But Nancy has a sense for these things, and she isn‘t the type of person to force herself on to people. Jonathan gives Will a pointed look; The nervous tension sets in right then, because *oh right, they have to talk about dad now.*

Will just hopes mom will make it quick. He really isn‘t interested in his father that much, as long as he just stays out of their lives. They didn‘t need him back in Hawkins, and now they need him less than ever. „Sit.“ mom tells them, pointing at the couch. She lets herself sink into the armchair. A short silence falls over the living room.

„Mom?“

At the sound of Jonathan‘s voice, her head jerks a bit. „Sorry, sweetie. You had a long drive and maybe this will be a bit much to wrap your head around. Your... your father is in town.“

„Yeah, I know. You told me on the phone. But why? What did he tell you?“

Mom leans forward. She buries her face in her hands. Because she remains silent, Will lowly says to Jonathan „They were fighting at first, but then dad said something... I don‘t know. Something serious. Something‘s wrong.“

„I figured that much.“ Jonathan whispers back. „He wouldn‘t just show up here if everything was alright. Hell, he must‘ve come through New York. Literally just a couple miles from our apartment.“ It must be an odd realization. At some point today, Jonathan and dad were almost in arms‘ reach of each other.

„I don‘t know how to tell you this.“ After just a few shaky breaths, mom continues, this time looking at both Will and Jonathan with wet eyes. „A couple of months ago, your father got diagnosed with lung cancer. They tried chemo for a while-“

He really did look like hell, Will thinks, and although the lack of emotion of this thought should terrify him, he feels a bit numb. No, not numb. Normal.

„-but you know how he is. He waited too long before seeing a doctor. It‘s spread so far that…“

Will can hear Jonathan swallow thickly, but his face shows nothing at all. Not a hint of empathy. He just looks as indifferent as Will is feeling. „…that?“

„So far that there‘s nothing they can do for him anymore.“ mom concludes. „They‘ve given him about three months. Give or take a few weeks.“

„Okay…“ Jonathan says, his voice betraying confusion. „Doesn‘t explain why he‘s here. I mean, I would‘ve understood if he just needed money to pay his hospital bills. That‘d be like him. But if they‘ve given up, then what the hell does he want?“

„Jonathan…“ mom chides. „He just wants to see you boys. He wants to-“

„Bullshit!“ Jonathan almost shouts. His slams his hands flat on the coffee table. „Bullshit! Just because he‘s dying doesn‘t mean you can believe a word he says. He wants something.“

Maybe, a few years ago, mom would have told Jonathan off for swearing. But he‘s an adult, and on top of that he is upset. Will wouldn‘t get away with it, but Jonathan does. Mom looks at him with some pity. „I do believe him. This time.“

„Yeah well he‘s not gonna see me, I can tell you that. Will?“

As Jonathan looks to Will for support, it feels like all eyes are on him. Like he is about to make a decision for all of them. „I-“ he stammers. „I don‘t know.“

„You both decide for yourselves if you want to talk to him.“ mom says softly.

„Jonathan, I don‘t know.“ Will ponders. „I mean, he‘s probably not lying about having cancer, right?“

„And?“ Jonathan sneers. „Do you want him to throw insults in your face again? Give him the chance to degrade you one last time before

he kicks the bucket? He can go fuck himself.“

„Jonathan-“ mom warns him.

„No!“ he shoots back. „I‘d kill him myself if I could get away with it!“ He doesn‘t really mean it; That‘s just one of these things people say in a rage, and Will figures, Jonathan holds a lot more bitterness towards dad than anyone else in the family.

„I can be there if you want.“ mom offers.

„That doesn‘t change *a thing*.“ Jonathan spits. „It‘s not about you, it‘s about him. Who does he think he is? What makes him think he has the right to- to-“

„Jonathan, please don‘t.“ Will tries, but his brother is by the door in a matter of seconds.

„Gonna take a walk.“ he proclaims, stomping into his shoes and punching his fists through the sleeves of his jacket. „To think about some things.“ But that‘s a half lie, because seconds after he has closed the door behind him, the unmistakable sound of a fifteen year old engine coughing into life can be heard.

Getting up from the couch, Will feels dizzy. „You‘re staying home from school tomorrow.“ mom says, leaving no room to protest. „I‘ll call you in sick.“

„Someone‘s gonna have to tell Nancy and El about this.“

„I know. I‘ll take care of it.“ She leans over to carefully cup his cheek, but Will is too numb to really register. „Do you maybe want to call Adrian?“

„N-No, I think I‘m gonna... gonna tell him tomorrow.“ Will slowly trots up the stairs, lets the door to his room fall shut behind him - and ends up falling asleep before his head hits the pillow.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

> Just a bit of angsty fluff because I can't get enough of my boys.

Will leans into the touch to his cheek. A simple gesture proving that Adrian really isn‘t mad at him for not calling. „I was worried sick all day, y‘know.“

„I know. I would‘ve been too. I‘m-“

„Hey, no. It‘s alright. Don‘t apologize. This must be a lot to... to process. Any news from Jonathan?“

„Nowhere to be found. But he‘s not just going to leave Nancy here.“ Will says. He should worry more, but then again Jonathan is an adult and he can go wherever he wants whenever he wants. Which doesn‘t make him immune to Nancy‘s wrath - of which there is a lot by now - but still. Not even mom is fretting too much about him being gone for almost an entire day. She is pissed, though.

„I guess everyone has their own way of coping.“

„You think?“ Will stares at his fingers, almost ashamed of what he is about to say. „And what if you don‘t cope at all? What if you find out a complete stranger is dying of cancer, and you tell yourself ‚That‘s sad‘ and then go on with your life as though nothing has happened? He lived with us for ten years and I really don‘t know him.“

„If you were like that, we wouldn‘t be talking about this right now.“ Adrian points out. „You‘re... you‘re agonizing over this and you don‘t even realize, do you?“

„I just don‘t know if I want to talk to him. Like, what good would it do? He never had anything good to say about me anyways.“ Will expects a rebuttal. Not because he actually wants to be talked into meeting his father; He wants to argue. It‘s odd, but Will feels the need to make a point and defend it, to become aggressive in the process. He wants someone to shout at. Adrian falls silent, just watching the blank TV screen reflecting color from the holiday lights they have put up in the attic.

„I would want to know.“ Adrian eventually says quietly.

„You‘d-“

Adrian‘s fingers claw into Will‘s shoulder as he shakes his head. „No, I mean, I do want to know.“

„What do you want to know.“

„If...“ His thickening voice stalls for a second. „If my parents could see me now. What would they say?“

Feeling a sudden stab to the chest, Will swallows. It‘s been a year, an

entire year, and Adrian has *never* spoken about his parents, except for that day up by the lighthouse. And even then, all Will got was *‚They died.‘* So, Will has no idea what‘s about to come. As much as he would like to tell Adrian they‘d be proud of him, Will didn‘t know them. So it would sound hollow.

„I think my dad wouldn‘t understand. A-And my mom would try, but I guess she‘d fail. Maybe they would just kick me out for being a fag, but I‘m never gonna know and that... that hurts.“

Will feels terrible for only half listening, but right now, absently playing with a few bangs of Adrian‘s hair, a thought is forming in the back of his head; He could just do it for himself. For certainty. What does he have to lose? He couldn‘t think any less of his father, and if the worst that can happen is being called a fag, then whatever. Better than spending years wondering what could have been said.

„You know, Harvard lawyers.“ Adrian goes on, and Will could punch himself for not paying more attention. „They weren‘t exactly forward thinking.“

Even from up close, Will can‘t spot any tears or even reddened eyes. He knows too well, that‘s not how it works after a while. You can‘t cry forever, even if you want to. Eventually, the pain settles deep within. It becomes dull, feasible but not so much that is can make you cry. And if you‘re not prepared, you end up asking yourself what‘s wrong with you for not feeling more.

„Do you talk to Melissa sometimes?“ Will asks hesitantly.

„N-No.“ Adrian answers. „Not really. She doesn‘t like to. But that‘s okay, really.“

„It‘s not.“ Will‘s hand comes up gently. He has made a decision for himself, and he‘s going to tell Jonathan later and ask him to come along, but that topic can rest for the moment. He half-forces Adrian to lie down on the couch while sliding to the floor himself. „Talk to me, then.“

„Really?“

Will crosses his legs, getting comfortable on the carpet. One hand feels for Adrian‘s heart in a hopefully comforting touch. „What happened?“

„Nothing special.“ Weakly, Adrian shrugs. His voice is calm, but his heart begins racing, almost bursting out of his chest. „About fifty-one thousand people died in car accidents in 1980. One percent less than in 1979 and four percent more than in 1981. Statistically irrelevant, and-“

„Stop.“ Will chokes up. „Don‘t say that. It‘s relevant to you.“ He wonders if he could ever think about his father as a number in a diagram about cancer deaths in the US, but the thought is too far out there. And that is with dad literally being a drunk, most of the time unemployed, slob who did nothing but invoke discomfort and sometimes fear in the house. Maybe it‘s just Adrian‘s way of coping.

„Objectively speaking-“

„You can‘t speak objectively.“ Will interrupts again. This all sounds too well practiced. Does Adrian lie awake at night, repeating these statistics as a sort of mantra? Trying to tell himself that, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn‘t matter? *Two-hundred and twenty million people in this country, and two of them died. The world didn‘t stop for them. Only a handful of people even took notice.*

„If you say so, doctor.“ Adrian makes an attempt to grin, but it doesn‘t quite work. Instead, it just makes Will tear up a little. „Hey, how come we‘re talking about me now, anyway?“

„I‘ll be fine.“ Will tells him with a certainty that even surprises himself. „But you‘re not.“

„I am fine.“ Adrian insists. „I don‘t even…“

„What?“

„I don‘t even wanna turn back time anymore.“

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

> This took way too long again. I've been working on other stuff mainly, but I also spent several days not writing at all, because if it feels like a chore, it's not done properly. People tell me they wish they could leave more Kudos (which is nice, THANK YOU!), and that means I'm doing something right here. I'm not going to ruin that by forcing things.

Mom rarely ever yells. But this time, Jonathan has overstepped. Not some rule she could impose on him, just the boundaries of what he can do to her. And vanishing without a trace for a full thirty hours crosses one of these. It‘s almost eleven at night when the family can hear his car out by the curb - the rattle of the engine is all too familiar, and everyone is sure that the damn thing won‘t last another year - she is by the door. Her anger falters slightly when she sees him, as does Will‘s. She still shouts, which isn‘t like her at all. „Where have you been? Hey, I‘m talking to you!“

But Jonathan lets the door fall shut without a sign of acknowledgment. He pushes past mom and Will, up the stairs. „Just picking up my stuff.“

„What do you mean?“

Halfway up, he stalls to turn around. „That we‘re going back to New York tonight. Nancy!“

„I‘m here.“ comes her flat voice from the kitchen. Will really isn‘t in the mood for relationship drama, but there is nowhere he can go.

Mom blocks the entrance to the living room, and now Nancy is standing in the door to the kitchen, arms crossed. „Do I get a say in this? Or do you just want to jam me in the trunk like your luggage?“

„I- I can come pick you up on Sunday if you want to stay.“

„Unbelievable.“ Nancy huffs.

„I think you owe us a bit more after that little stunt.“ mom says. „I‘m not letting you go like this.“

„Yeah?“ Jonathan grumbles. „But I‘m gonna go. And I‘m not coming back as long as *he* is here. I made up my mind, I‘m not talking to him.“

„Will you at least tell us where you‘ve been? We‘ve all been worried sick. You could have at least called!“

Jonathan‘s shoulders slump. He looks like hell; His hair standing up in all directions, a bit more greasy than it should be. He is still in the same clothes that he wore when he took off. Not to mention the dark circles around his eyes probably from lack of sleep. „Needed some time to think.“

„You‘re dodging.“ mom deadpans.

„I‘m not dodging. I just didn‘t really go anywhere. Okay?“ Jonathan

turns around fully now, but remains on the stairs. „I just... I really have to get out of here, alright?“ Then, talking to Nancy, he adds „Are you coming, or do you want me to pick you up later?“

Nancy shakes her head. „It‘s two hours to New York and you can barely stand up straight. You‘re not going anywhere. I‘m not letting you kill yourself out there.“

„I could... I could have something to eat first.“ Jonathan relents with hesitation.

„You could have a few hours of sleep too.“ mom adds, or rather, she orders.

There is some pot roast left from dinner, and it‘s even good pot roast, because Nancy helped cook it. Will is pretty sure by now that they‘re never going to find out where Jonathan has been, but it doesn‘t matter anyways. All that matters is that he will not talk to dad, meaning that Will is going to be alone.

Jonathan eats everything that‘s left of dinner and chugs down a few glasses of water with it as though he had nothing to eat or drink since yesterday afternoon. Nancy still looks pissed. Will overheard her confiding with El that she‘d like him to sleep on the couch, but telling him that in front of mom would feel extremely awkward. Will sort of gets that she doesn‘t want mom to think too much about what they do in the privacy of Jonathan‘s bedroom. Hell, Will doesn‘t want to think about it either.

„Did he call or come by again?“ Jonathan asks after a while.

„No.“ mom sighs, pouring hot water over a teabag. „But it‘s just been a day. I don‘t think he expects to hear from us before next weekend. Believe it or not, he understands this is hard for you.“

Jonathan snorts indignantly. „Yeah right. Hard.“

„If it‘s not hard, why did you go?“

At this, Jonathan seems at a loss for words. He shakes his head slowly, fidgets with the string of his teabag, and closes his eyes for a few seconds. „I told you yesterday I‘m not going to see him. And I meant it.“

All eyes are on Will that very moment. He can feel the expectations in their glances. Mom, Nancy and El all know his decision. „I want to meet him.“

It‘s as though Jonathan is startled, pulled out of deep thought by this. „You what?“

„I want to meet dad.“ Will repeats. „I‘ll talk to him, no matter what. But I‘d... I‘d really want to have you there. Because I don‘t think mom should come along.“

Jonathan lets this sink for a few seconds. He sips from his cup, clearly weighing his options, of which there aren‘t many. „Why in the world

would you want to meet him? Will, we had...“ He throws a side-glance at mom and then continues without mercy. „We had a funeral for you, and he only came because he thought he could sue someone over your death. He‘s sick!“

„I know. I know about all of this. It can‘t get any worse, can it? There‘s nothing he could do or say that he hasn‘t already. And if there‘s just a tiny little chance that I can take something positive from it, I‘m okay with that.“

„There is not chance.“ Jonathan says lowly. Silence follows, with Jonathan radiation an unbelievable amount of tension. Will thinks he looks close to exploding again. But he doesn‘t. All tension dissolves in one exhale from him. „I can‘t possibly let you meet him alone.“

„S-So you‘re coming?“

„Do I have a choice?“

„You do.“ mom chimes in. „And I don‘t want to dictate anything. But I think if you meet him, that‘s...“

„That‘s more than dad would do in your situation.“ Will completes for her. „I think if we don‘t go, we‘re no better than him. Y‘know, maybe he doesn‘t want us to come. Maybe he just wants to make a point. That we‘re no different than him.“ This is far-fetched, but at least it‘s a good way of convincing Jonathan.

„There are conditions. Not here. Somewhere in public.“ Jonathan says. „In the afternoon when people are around. How about, uh... let‘s say Gosman‘s Dock. You know, lots of restaurants and stores. Next Friday or Saturday.“

„Saturday.“ Will says. „You shouldn‘t miss another day of classes over this.“

Mom will make the necessary call in the morning, and because Jonathan is clearly tired of this discussion, they leave it at that for the night. „I‘ll make sure he gets some sleep.“ Nancy assures mom while he can already be heard trotting up the stairs.

„Don‘t be too mad at him, sweetie.“ mom tells her, seeing her off for the night. „Everyone has their own way of dealing with things.“

And Jonathan‘s way, Will thinks, is understandable. He probably holds more resentment towards their father than Will does, for one reason or another.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

> For a long, long time I refused to write Lonnie. Just because I didn't know if I could give him more depth than his few minutes of screen time in Season 1 do. He is human, after all, and humans just aren't flat. I hope I could get at least a bit of that across.

They could have chosen a better day than Saturday. The day before was sunshine, windy but actually one of these days when you want to be outside. One of these fall days when kids fly kites on the beach and when you can sit on a bench without trembling from the cold. But this Saturday, the day for which the meeting is set, is just overcast. It looks and feels like rain. An odd feeling, as though the town of Montauk will be drenched to the bone before sunset.

„Do you think he‘ll come?“ Will mumbles as they stare at the water. By the dock, in the shelter the bay provides, it‘s calm. Less than half a mile north, waves are crashing on the cliffs and washing over the beaches.

„Remember when he wanted to take you to that baseball game and then called the whole thing off?“ Jonathan says. „In the end you were glad.“

But Will isn‘t his old self anymore. He isn‘t scared of dad. And this isn‘t a baseball game, something he couldn‘t care less about; It‘s probably the last time he is going to see dad. He just *has* to show up. Will leans his head back and blinks at the dark gray sky. „What time is it?“

„He‘s ten minutes late. Will... let‘s just go home.“

Will shakes his head. „Ten more minutes.“ He is actually planning to wait longer, if necessary, though he feels it‘s best not to tell Jonathan this. For a while, the two alternate between watching people walk in and out of stores and seafood restaurants, of which there are many here, and turning towards the see to breathe in the brine. Right as Will leans on a handrail, he feels the thing vibrate from someone else doing the same. Not Jonathan, though.

„Damn, you‘ve grown.“

Externally, Will stays calm. But his insides start boiling over this instant. „Since he was ten?“ Jonathan sneers from behind them, and then quickly pushes in between Will and their father. „Yeah, that happens.“

„Not here to argue.“ dad says. Will gets a good look of him, and damn, he really does seem like a terminally ill man. At least he has put on a hat today so people don‘t have to bear the sight of his brittle post-chemo hair. But he is also lacking in the eyebrow department, and that‘s just creepy.

„Then why are you here?“ Jonathan asks in a demanding tone.

„Jonathan...“ Will says softly. „Come on.“

Their father grins. „Yeah, come on. Your mother told you why I‘m

here?“

Before Jonathan can lash out more, Will says „She told us you‘re sick.“

„Looks like it. Jeez, look at this place. What was she thinking moving you here? Hoping to hook up with a rich New York banker on vacation?“

Jonathan snorts. „Do we have to listen to this? I think coming here was a bad idea.“

„She wanted to get far away from Hawkins.“ Will tells dad, ignoring his brother. „She had her reasons and I‘m… happy about it.“

Dad nods. „I guess I can think of a worse place to kick the bucket. Never thought I‘d set foot outside Indiana in my life.“ He reaches into his pocket, flicks open the pack of cigarettes and lets his lighter click. He offers one to Jonathan too, but he just wrinkles his nose. „Look at Mister I‘m-Gonna-Live-To-Ninety. Hey, I‘m not the one who broke contact. She could‘ve at least told me you were moving.“

„Mom tried to call you.“

„Yeah, sure. Sure she did.“ Blowing smoke out of his nostrils, dad flicks ashes into the sea. „And I‘m the bad guy in this, as always. That‘s how you kids will remember me.“

This isn‘t going in a direction Will likes. Jonathan looks about ready to jump at their father. „Right… So you‘re not the one who broke contact, and you‘re not the bad guy. Will you tell us what you are then? Because I‘m already sick of this.“

„Huh, so you‘ve finally grown some balls, kid. Was about time.“

„What, you think it takes balls to call you out for your crap?“

Will feels helpless, unable to defuse the situation. He is sure that, under different circumstances, these two would start an all out fist fight. All that‘s holding them back is the fact they‘re in public, and maybe the way dad keeps leaning on the handrail as though he is having trouble to stand right.

„So… What do you do?“ he asks, this time sounding weary in a way Will has never heard from him.

„What do you mean?“

Rolling his eyes, dad chuckles. „I mean for a living. Or college, or whatever. Seriously, I want to know.“

„Okay…“ Jonathan says curtly. „NYU. Photography. But it doesn‘t look like you‘re going to live to see me make real money. If that‘s what you‘re after.“

„Hell, what do I need money for? No, no, I got enough money to feed myself until it‘s over.“

„Don‘t talk about it like that.“ Will quietly says. They both turn their heads, seemingly only now realizing he is still there, still witnessing their argument. „Doesn‘t it scare you?“

Again, dad laughs wryly. „Still the thin-skinned one. Look, one day you‘re alive, the next day you‘re not. That‘s how the world works.“

„Then why are you here?“ Will presses, but softer than Jonathan did. „If nothing matters because we all die, what do you want from us?“

„Hey, don‘t twist my words, son.“ Dad drops the remnants of his cigarette into the water. If the wind didn‘t growl in Will‘s ear, he‘d probably hear it hiss. „I wanted to see if I got anything to show for. Looks like you kids are gonna make it big. Makes a dying man proud, is all.“

Jonathan is easy to read. Red-faced and white-knuckled he scowls at dad. „If we do, that‘s not your achievement. Whatever I‘m doing, it‘s in spite of you.“

„Oh yeah? Still means I‘m contributing. What about girls? You a stud like your old man?“ When Jonathan doesn‘t answer, dad lights himself the next coffin nail. „Course not. I guess if you wanna make voyeurism your job, the ladies keep their distance.“

„Don‘t think you know a thing about me.“ Jonathan warns with his finger raised - a gesture that would have earned him a firm shove in times long gone.

„Ah, whatever. Anyone can buy a hooker, am I right?“

„Will, come on.“ Jonathan presses through gritted teeth. „I think we‘re done here. I really don‘t have to listen to this.“

But since Will doesn‘t feel they are done here, he shakes his head no. „You go ahead.“

There are no words of goodbye between Jonathan and their father, but then again Will‘s brother doesn‘t leave. He just positions himself out of hearing distance, but close enough to watch with eagle-eyes. „Do you know how close he was to drowning you? If you got to know, he‘s with Nancy Wheeler. And it‘s serious.“

„No shit.“ Dad looks over his shoulder for a second. „Now I‘m *really* proud. And you?“

„What about me?“ Will huffs.

Dad vaguely points at a spot on his neck. „Nice hickey you were sporting there last week. Jeez, how old are you now? Here‘s hoping you‘re not trying to make me a grandfather just yet.“

There it is, the topic that Will was both dreading and looking forward to talking about. A part of him still wants to hide. Another part wants to rub it in, hold it under his father‘s nose so that he has to cope with the knowledge that he was right all along. His son really is a queer and a fairy. „Nah, I don‘t think I‘ll ever make you a grandfather. My boyfriend would be pissed if I got a girl pregnant.“

It‘s not like Will‘s father has to process these words first. He understands immediately, but opts not to yell, or threaten, or voice his resentment. This, in turn, disappoints Will, who would have gladly yelled back and defended himself, even at the risk of everyone around overhearing that *Will Byers is a fag*.

„Few years back a guy at the bar bet me ten bucks you‘re a queer. Told him no son of mine will ever be a queer. Thank god we‘re not in Hawkins anymore, huh?“ he says after a while of listening to the sound of splashing water.

„Yeah.“ Will agrees. „So you don‘t care?“

„I would‘ve a year ago. But right now I‘m too tired to care. I‘m not gonna be around long enough to beat it out of you. Just don‘t get yourself infected with anything, for your mother‘s sake. Does she know?“

„She‘s fine with it.“ *Beat it out of me*, Will thinks, hoping that he doesn‘t change his mind and try it. Or else Jonathan might end up being charged with murder or manslaughter.

Dad grimaces, showing both disgust and condescension. „Of course she is. Women... I swear you wouldn‘t have turned out that way with me around.“

„I think I‘m gonna go now.“ Will says. He has said all he wanted to say, and now he is really starting to feel the same way as Jonathan. Nothing good will come of this. He isn‘t hurt, or frightened, or really moved in any significant way. Annoyed at best, because instead of curling up on the couch with Adrian and a cup hot chocolate, he is out here in the cold listening to the man who used to fuel many of his nightmares during his childhood.

„Yeah, do that. Think I‘ll stay for a while. Tell your brother it was nice seeing you kids again.“ No glances are exchanged. Dad stares at the water stoically, and Will doesn‘t hesitate, although he knows they‘ll never meet again.

Jonathan looks relieved when Will joins him, already fidgeting with his car keys. „You alright, bud?“

„I guess.“ Will shrugs. „Don‘t know what I was hoping for.“

Jonathan makes and indignant gesture. „Whatever. I hope he got what he was looking for so he doesn‘t bother us again. Do you think he‘ll stay in town until, y‘know?“

„Where else would he go?“ Thoughtlessly, Will cranes his neck and spies over his shoulder. Something deep inside of him churns painfully when he finds their father standing upright, hands in his pockets, looking after them. Even from a distance, you can see the

sickness eating him from the inside. But it‘s suddenly so very clear that it‘s not just the cancer that is plaguing him.

„Will? Hey, we gotta go.“

„Yeah, just... just wait a second.“ Will tells his brother. He does the weirdest thing then, just by turning around. He briskly walks back, oddly certain that he is doing the right thing. Will doesn‘t remember ever hugging his dad, but that‘s what he does. It‘s awkward, smells like cigarette ash and whiskey, but Will at least imagines seeing a hint of peace flash over dad‘s face when it‘s over. He even says a brief goodbye.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

> Ughh... FINALLY I'm getting things done again. I haven't posted a word in a month, and every day of it felt worse than the last. So here you go. The Will & Ell sibling fluff chapter you deserve.
>
> More things are coming, btw. I'm hard at work on another chapter of 'It's the doubt', plus I'll add a chapter to a oneshot I did well over a year ago, just because I'm feeling like it. That one's going to be a true monstrosity.

An episode in the life of a family. Will and Jonathan agree that the whole thing was no more than that; Saturday ends quietly and in thought. Mom, bless her, only asks how it went once. Will shrugs because he doesn‘t know how to put his feelings into one sentence - which is about as much as he is willing to say. Jonathan gruffly says „As expected. Let‘s not talk about it.“, and they leave it at that. She doesn‘t pressure them, she doesn‘t mention the whole situation again that night. Will thinks he‘ll talk to her about it eventually, but Jonathan is very adamant to forget it as fast as he can and get on with his life. It takes both of them a few hours to process this day, that‘s just natural, but after dinner, things are almost back to normal, if a little glum.

Will feels about as tired as Jonathan looks, though, so in the end they call it a day before the clock even strikes eight. Jonathan is quick to vanish into his bedroom together with Nancy, and Will calls Adrian for a quick checkup before bed. Will really is tired, making him grateful that Adrian doesn‘t press the matter too much. He needs his worries soothed, just wants to hear that Will is okay, and after just five minutes hangs up comforted, with the promise to visit first thing tomorrow. Having something to look forward to, Will crawls under his covers.

Sleep comes quick, like a jackhammer to the head it knocks Will out. He closes his eyes at eight - they snap open again at twelve, just as though it has only been a mere second. The blackness of his bedroom is wrapped around him like a veil that he can break through, which he tries for a few seconds before he realizes that he must have slept for a few hours. Groggy, thirsty, wide awake, Will first rolls to his side, groaning, then heaves himself up. He needs a glass of water, and quick.

There is light in the kitchen, he realizes while sneaking downstairs. A shadow dances on the wall eerily, water plashes from the tap. „El?“

„Huh?“

Will realizes that just calling out for her was a bit careless; When she first moved in with them, she would have now dropped her glass, that‘s how jumpy El used to be. It‘s fine, though. Standing by the sink, she blinks through a sleepy haze. „Sorry, didn‘t want to startle you. Thirsty?“

„Uh-huh.“ El nods. „Couldn‘t sleep so well.“

„Ugh, I thought I‘d sleep through.“ Will complains. He fetches himself a glass of water as well, swallows every last drop greedily. „But I‘m awake now. Think you can go back to sleep?“

El gives a shrug. „I‘m hot.“

„It‘s almost freezing outside.“

„No… I mean hot… in here. Don‘t know what it means.“ El makes a vague gesture to her stomach. „I can‘t stand that.“

„Restless?“ Will supplies, because the heat that sometimes pools in the pit of his belly is just too similar to this. „Does it feel like you want to run, or jump, make a bunch of noise?“

Another nod. „I‘m twitchy too.“

„I know what it‘s like. Feels like you can‘t breathe, huh? How about we get you some fresh air? C‘mon, let‘s get dressed.“

It‘s not like Will is planning to run around the neighborhood at midnight, so he figures his mom wouldn‘t mind. All he really does is grab some pillows from the living room, place them on the porch swing outside, and offer his sister a seat. No light from anywhere; Streetlamps are far between here, windows just black mirrors with nothing to reflect, as the sky is overcast. Breath clouding from behind her scarf, El sits there with bobbing legs.

„Deep breaths.“ Will tells her.

„It‘s just so stuffy inside sometimes.“

„Do you want to tell me what you‘ve been thinking about?“ Will waits out the silence that follows. „It‘s okay if you don‘t want to.“

Slowly, El shakes her head. She looks frustrated, the way she usually looks when she can‘t find the right words. No matter how many times everyone tells her that doesn‘t make her stupid, Will knows she still thinks less of herself whenever it happens. „About your dad.“ she sighs eventually. „I think.“

„You think?“

„Why didn‘t he take care of you?“

„Oh wow.“ Will laughs wryly. „I haven‘t asked myself that in a while. I always just thought... that‘s how things are in my family. It‘s not like I‘ve ever missed him, or anything.“

„But he‘s your dad.“ El retaliates. „And he has no excuse.“

That is something Will can agree to. „He doesn‘t. But it is what it is, I guess.“

„I just don‘t understand. How can someone choose this? My dad didn‘t have a choice.“

„What do you mean? Hopper made the best choice he could, didn‘t he? He took you in by his own free will. Says a lot about him.“

Thoughtful silence. More bobbing legs, frustrated huffs. „Not Hopper. I mean my real- No, not my real dad. Hopper was my *real* dad, I meant my-“

„Your biological father.“ Will suggests. He starts paying more attention then. Knowing next to nothing about El‘s family, this makes him curious. „What do you know about him?“

„Not much. Aunt Becky said his name was Andrew. And that he died in the war.“

„In Vietnam?“

„Yeah. Hopper was there too. Sometimes I wonder if they met.“

„Probably not.“ Will shrugs. „Vietnam is a big place. We had, like, half a million soldiers over there. My dad got lucky he wasn‘t drafted.“

„It‘s not fair.“ El deadpans, and that is exactly what Will thinks that very moment. „Maybe he wanted me. Maybe he could have saved Mama.“

„Maybe. Probably.“ Will blinks into the darkness. „And then there are people who never wanted their kids, and they are still around.“ Though his own father won‘t be around much longer, he thinks, but

doesn‘t say it.

Resting on his shoulder, El huffs out a warm cloud shakily. „I‘m sorry if I‘m being ungrateful.“

Will puts an arm around his sister. „Don‘t say that. You had a right to your parents. You still do.“ He could never resent El for mourning a life she could have had. Hell, Will would do the same. Years and years lost to darkness and abuse, and the horrors didn‘t even stop at the fence of this cursed laboratory. They just had to follow her, as though she hadn‘t already endured enough.

Head tugged under his chin, El breathes. Deep, greedy, as though she can‘t get enough night air. Will doesn‘t know how long, but it hardly matters. Neither of them is going to sleep another minute tonight, and that‘s fine. Will can survive on four hours if need be. „Are you okay?“

„Better.“ El whispers. „Cold.“

„Yeah, it‘s getting a little chilly, huh? Are you hungry?“

„Maybe a bit.“

Will knows she can‘t see his smile in the dark, but he flashes her one regardless. He gets up, reciting one of Jonathan‘s favorite quotes from his childhood. From nights spent awake for lack of the ability to find rest. „What you need is cereal and Saturday Night Live.“

8. Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

> Please hate on me. It's been too long, I know. Trying to get back on track with the writing if I can!
> Yep, this is me pretending anyone is still interested in this fic. :) But I am, so it's okay.

„Oh god dammit, can you please stop that clock?“

Watching Adrian lay down the Atari controller to get ready for his bike ride home, Will makes an indignant sound, somewhere between groaning and laughter. „We got school tomorrow, and you *really* need your beauty sleep. I‘d just keep you awake.“

Adrian rolls from his stomach to his back, stretches, and yawns. „I guess you‘re right. You sure you‘re okay?“

„Adrian-“

„Just tell me. Even if you‘re not. I‘ll sleep better if I know.“

He just can not understand. That is okay, really, but Will has to at least try to convey how little he cares. He would much rather not think about it anymore. Will takes Adrian by the shoulder and puts his entire weight into pulling his boyfriend on top of him. „What do I have to do to convince you?“

Adrian hovers over him for a few seconds, grinning, before he presses their lips together. „Okay, okay. You got me convinced already. So we just get on with it and forget anything even happened, got it.“

„I mean, that‘s what we did all day.“

„Yeah, but in a tense sort of way.“ Adrian says. He gives a long, almost mournful sigh. „Guess I‘m gonna have to get going now.“

Will struggles a bit, unable to get out of the position he got himself into. „Doesn‘t look like you‘re quite ready.“ he notes.

„No, not without my goodbye kiss.“

„Does that mean if I don‘t kiss you goodbye, you get to stay longer?“

Adrian‘s expression turns blank for a second. „Stuck between a rock and a hard place. Alright, c‘mere.“ They are just an inch apart, already in anticipation of today‘s goodbye, when the sound of glass shattering somewhere downstairs breaks up the moment. „What was that?“

Will shrugs. „Not the first time someone‘s knocked over a glass in this house.“ The moment really is gone, though, so he gives Adrian a peck and the two get up. Climbing down the ladder from the attic, Will realizes that there must be something going on. At least his mother‘s frantic voice implies it.

The first words he picks up are „...you sure? Are you absolutely- yes, I understand. Can you tell me anything else? How did it happen? ... Of course, yeah. Do you need me to come in and take care of things?“

„Mom?“ he mouths when he sees her, standing in the kitchen with the phone in hand and a pile of glass shards by her feet. She just keeps running a shaking hand across her forehead. Spotting him, she holds her finger up, signaling him to wait.

Jonathan is already standing in the doorway to the living room. He shrugs upon Will‘s curious gaze. „Three tomorrow. I... yeah, I got it.“ their mom says into the phone. „Yes, see you then. Thank you.“ She hangs the phone up, and by the look of her face alone, Will can suddenly tell what has happened.

„He-“ Mom swallows, hard. „I don‘t know how to tell you this. Let me... just let me...“ Tears have started to spill over by the time she sinks down in a kitchen chair.

„Mom!“ Jonathan rushes over to her. „Careful.“ he stops Will, who was just about to step into the shards. „Could you clean that up?“

Will fetches the dustpan, and under Adrian‘s worried gaze, he cleans the floor. It‘s not like he cares too much. Not about the glass, not about his dad who just died. He just flatly says „Was that the police? It was about dad? He‘s... dead?“, just to spare his mom the search for the right words.

She nods. „They couldn‘t tell me what happened exactly, just... just that they found him in his motel room.“ Jonathan has an arm draped around her. He looks at Will with a blank expression that perfectly mirrors how Will himself is feeling. Sorry for their mom who has every right to cry - hell, she has even got a reason - but not much else. She used to love him, that much Will knows, in a time before he became who he was during Will‘s childhood. So in a way, she is crying over someone he has never met.

Adrian comes up next to him and whispers „I don‘t think I should be here right now.“

„I‘m fine.“ Will says quietly.

„I know, I know. But your mom isn‘t. Take care of her. And call me tomorrow, yeah?“

„Promise.“

Will‘s cheek is a bit numb to the kiss Adrian gives him. „Love you.“ Adrian leaves quietly.

Nancy, with nowhere to go without Jonathan, stays in the background. Once the floor is clean, the brothers help their mom to the living room. „I‘ll be fine. I‘ll be fine, really.“ she tries to assure them, all shaky and frail looking. „It can‘t have been the cancer, it just can‘t! Didn‘t they give him a few more months?“

„Maybe he lied.“ Jonathan says. „Maybe these predictions aren‘t all that accurate, I don‘t know. We‘ll know more tomorrow. I‘m going with you to the station.“

„W-What? You‘ve got class tomorrow, and you need a good night‘s sleep. It‘s a two hour drive back to the city.“

„Well, I‘m staying.“ Jonathan tells her, as though that is obvious. „You need a level-headed adult in the house right now.“ Does he even realize how full of himself he just sounded? Probably not, Will thinks. He isn‘t quite sure if this numbness, this indifference, is actually the right thing to feel.

„Oh yeah? And what about Nancy? Do you just want to decide for her?“

„If she wants to go back to New York, I‘ll drive her. And then I‘ll come back.“

Mom laughs weakly. „Sometimes I can‘t believe you. You already missed a day last week. Unless you think you can‘t handle yourself in class tomorrow, you‘re going.“

„I can handle myself just fine.“ Jonathan shakes his head slowly. „I‘m *feeling* just fine. But you‘re not, and I gotta be here to-“

„I‘ll make sure he goes to class.“ Nancy says very suddenly. She has a steaming mug in her hand. Her voice is soft, quieter than Will has

ever heard it. She gives the mug to Will‘s mom. It‘s tea, but with a smell that burns in Will‘s nostrils. „It‘ll help. Joyce, I‘m so sorry. I don‘t even know what to say.“

„You don‘t have to say anything, honey.“ mom says. „This is good.“ she adds after a small sip from the hot brew in her mug.

„I had to... go through some cabinets to find the bottle. Sorry about that.“

„Oh please. I‘ve got nothing to hide. Thank you, Nancy. Please make sure you two get some sleep. Oh, and Nancy?“

„Yeah?“

Mom fights it for a few seconds because she obviously knows how Jonathan is going to feel. Then, she says it anyways. „I think you should drive.“

„Oh come on.“ Jonathan complains. „I‘m fine. I‘m totally fine!“

„Would it be so hard to give me some peace of mind?“ Mom is sounding harsh now. „I get that you‘re fine. Now you please understand that I‘m not.“

Jonathan, suddenly not so stubborn anymore, looks seriously ashamed of himself. „It‘s getting late.“ he sighs. „You sure you two

will be alright here?“

„We‘ll get through the night.“ Will tells his brother. He is relieved to see that, when they leave, Nancy is the one behind the wheel. It doesn‘t matter so much that Jonathan could convince her to switch later. It is already dark out, and to be honest, Will dreads the days to come. So many things have to be taken care of now. Stress, and expenses, and tears, and he can do little to help.

„Would you like to stay home from school tomorrow, sweetie?“ mom asks him later, when they are alone, watching TV. She has emptied her mug, and it is clear that she has become a little lightheaded from the rum in it. She is relaxed, though, so it‘s okay.

„No, I don‘t think so.“ Will blurts, wondering why she insists on Jonathan going to class, but then asks him to stay home. Does she think he is that sensitive? Does she believe he is heading for a breakdown? But in the middle of the dark living room, the glow of the TV reflects in her eyes, and Will understands. He can‘t just go to sleep and leave her alone tonight. „I guess they won‘t say anything if I miss a day or two.“

Notes for the Chapter:

> So yeah, I killed Lonnie. Big deal. We're all crying now.

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

> Well... I finished my main work. Two years of my life, and I had a blast. But I'm also glad it's over to be honest, because now I can get a few more things done before starting something big again. One of these things is this universe. I still have plans for it :)

She is whistling. Why is she whistling? Will has never heard his mom whistling - not that he could remember, at least. He wasn‘t even sure she was able to. But here she is, absently staring out of the passenger side window, reacting to the tune playing on the radio in the weirdest possible way. Will, although nervous about it, insisted that she doesn‘t drive in her shaky and absent state of mind.

It would be comforting to know she is watching the road as well, seeing as he has only had his permit for a month, but right now it‘s too much to ask, so Will concentrates as best as he can. Luckily, it‘s not a long way to the station. Less than fifteen minutes by car. The streets are empty too. „Did I just run a stop sign?“ Will knows he didn‘t, he just wants to see how aware his mom is.

„N-No. No, I don‘t think so, sweetie.“ she says. „I‘m sorry, I didn‘t-“

„It‘s okay, mom.“ Will says. „We‘ll be there in a minute. Do you want me to wait in the car?“

„If you want to come with, that‘s okay. Maybe it‘d be for the best, I mean, I don‘t want to... I think you should...“ What she probably wants to say is *‚I‘ll have a hard time telling you what killed your father. You better hear it from the officers.‘*

So when Will parks the car by the curb in front of the police station, he braces himself for what is to come. *Will he see the body?* What an unsettling idea. At least, with Montauk being just a step above a village, no introduction is needed. „Mrs. Byers.“ the officer behind the front desk says. „Will.“ He is a young guy - young enough to hang around the arcade - so Will has met him before. Kicked his ass in *OutRun*.

„Tommy... hi.“ he says awkwardly.

„I... know why you‘re here.“ Tommy says. „I‘m sorry. Officer McKinnon is ready for you. Last door on the left.“

It‘s as though stares follow them as they head to the office, but that might also be imagination. People dying is nothing new to the police, and having relatives of decease people around sure isn‘t either. Will suddenly realizes that this isn‘t his mom‘s first time in a situation like this, and when he looks at her it‘s obvious to him that these memories from three years back are now resurfacing.

„You don‘t have to, mom.“ he says. „Maybe I could go in and you just wait-“

„Oh, don‘t be ridiculous.“ she says shakily. A second later she gives him an apologetic look. „Sorry, honey. I‘ll be fine.“

The door is open, and before either of them can knock on the frame, the officer waves them in. McKinnon is one of the more tactful cops

Will has met. He expresses his condolences a few times before getting into the matter.

„Alright, ma‘am. This... isn‘t easy for me either. Are you sure you want your son in here for this?“

Will feels his hand squeezed by his mom. „I‘m sure.“ she says. „I‘d end up telling him anyways. Please, just... let us know what you know.“

„We‘ll have to wait for the final lab results to close this case, uh, toxicology and all that. But what I can tell is that we found quite the number of empty pill containers with Mr. Byers. As far as we could tell these were all prescribed to him, so nothing illegal there. Just... a lot. Right now we‘re assuming an overdose.“

„So does that mean-“ Mom clears her throat, shaking more than before. „Will this be ruled a suicide?“

McKinnon flips open a manila folder, but without showing the contents to Will or his mom. For just a second he makes a painful grimace. „Well, people have overdosed by accident before, but... to me it looked intentional. He took every last pill. I wish I could tell you anything else, especially if any sort of life insurance is involved-“

„No.“ mom says. „None of that. We canceled our life insurance when we got divorced. Do I need to... identify...“ Her breaths come out shallow and fast at these words.

Will knows he can‘t let her do this. He can‘t let his mom go into a morgue. „I‘ll do it.“ he says immediately.

„That won‘t be necessary. We found his driver‘s license with Mr. Byers, so we could identify him. I mean, if you want to see him that‘s up to you.“

She shakes her head slowly. „No, I don‘t think so.“

McKinnon flips a few pages in his folder, mumbling. „Okay... something else... where is it... ah, this right here. It‘s a phone number. Mr. Byers left this note, asking you to call this number. It belongs to a lawyer in Indianapolis, I‘ve already informed him and he‘s expecting your call. Something about inheritance, I suppose.“

„What‘s there to inherit? I don‘t think Lonnie had a lot.“

„Well, there is his car for one.“ McKinnon says. „I talked to Gus Martin the, uh... the owner of the motel. The car can stay in his parking lot for now. Don‘t worry, it‘s safe there until you have things figured out.“

„That‘s good, that‘s... good.“ Will‘s mom reaches for the note with the phone number.

„Ah.“ McKinnon pulls it away. „Sorry. This is evidence. I‘ll write it down for you. Make sure to call the guy soon, he seemed a little stressed out.“

The drive home is as quiet as it gets, and for a good reason. They are both sort of lost in their thoughts, to a point where Will has to actively remind himself that he is driving, no matter how empty the streets might be. Whenever he glances at his mom, he finds her fiddling with the note.

„Are you going to call him today?“ he finally asks.

„Oh, no. No, I‘ll do it tomorrow morning. It‘s... a bit late for that isn‘t it? I‘d rather make dinner.“

„Mom?“

„Yes?“

„It‘s an hour earlier in Indiana.“

Will‘s mom ignores this, instead changing topics. „Do you want to have Adrian over for dinner? I‘d have to call Jonathan first, but then the phone is all yours.“

„Mom, do you think that‘s a good idea for tonight?“ Will feels himself getting a little creeped out here, especially since her voice is so airy and higher than usual. At this point he is just waiting for a

breakdown, praying it won‘t happen before they get home. He quickly throws in „I mean, if you‘re okay with it I‘ll ask him over, sure.“

But then, once they are home and the door is closed behind them, Will immediately knows that he isn‘t going to call Adrian over. „Mom...“ he says quietly, watching her become more agitated by the second. First she drops her keys. Then she trips over her own feet trying to pick them up. Will does it for her.

„Should we make dinner?“ El asks from the top of the stairs, where she has just appeared. Will can‘t even begin to tell her how grateful he is for her *not* asking how it went and what exactly happened. Timidly she walks downstairs. „I didn‘t want to... intrude.“

„Intrude?“ mom laughs hoarsely. „Sweetie, no. Don‘t think that for one second. You know what, you‘re right. You can make dinner if you‘d like to. I‘ll just-“

It is, thankfully, not the breakdown Will expected. He would say it‘s a long shot from an actual breakdown. Still, it‘s clear to him that no one in this house is really okay. His mom, because she is grieving, however irrational it may seem. Will, because he doesn‘t know if he can be what she needs right now. El, because she has hardly any part in all of this - just like Will felt when she and mom had lost Hopper.

„God, I‘m so sorry.“ mom says, hours later, after dinner, after Will has called Jonathan. „I shouldn‘t be behaving like this, it‘s just...“ She sinks further into the couch cushions. „I hadn‘t even seen him in years, and here I am unable to even *function!*“

By now, Will is feeling sleepy. He thinks it‘s stupid, trying to *function* in a time like this, but he doesn‘t say it. Will and El have taken mom in the middle between them, and the TV is whispering some nonsense at them with the volume turned down low. Will cuddles more into her side, and perhaps that‘s good enough for now. Because whatever he could or could not say, stressful and difficult days are upon them.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I've got to be honest with you, I didn't like this chapter. It feels sort of stiff, a bit forced and the pacing is off.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

> Uh... did I say I have plans for this?
> Did I say I want to make this a regular thing again? Because really, it was meant to be, like, six chapters...
> Did I take almost an entire year before updating again? You bet your sweet butts *sigh*
>
> And yeah, yeah, I know this is a pretty extensive AU and there is probably no one left who cares, but I care because this is my personal escapist comfort AU.

„Come on... come on, where is it?“ Mom is fumbling with the keys to the place. Her hands aren‘t shaking, something that Will is very pleased to see. Overall she seems to be doing a lot better today. As Will and Jonathan exchange glares, they are very much on the same page, hoping that they can all return to normality soon. „Ah, got it.“

„Mom, you know I don‘t really care for what this guy has to say, right?“ Jonathan complains again, but he follows their mom and Will into the closed store, her workplace. Her boss is nice enough to let them use his speaker phone for this call, and Will is honestly interested, although he is feeling somewhat sorry for Jonathan, who was basically coerced into coming along.

Their mom shows them the way to the office, shrugging. „Well, you‘re here now. And it won‘t kill you, Jon. Who knows, maybe you‘ll be surprised.“

„I have no desire to be-“

„Hush.“ mom says. The office isn‘t what Will would call tidy. He never would have suspected that a souvenir shop would generate so much paperwork, but maybe the file cabinets are all empty, and the stacks of folders on the desk are all there is. Expectantly, he looks at his mom. „Well, he said we could call at any time, so I guess here goes?“

She picks up the phone and punches in the lengthy number. There is an answer on the other end pretty quickly. „Yes, this is Joyce Byers... Mr. Orlov is expecting my call... exactly... thank you... thank you, I‘ll wait...“

Eventually, mom presses the button to put on the speaker, and the office is filled with the white noise of a line on hold. „No music?“ Will chuckles.

„Not a glamorous law firm like you see in the movies. I mean, *Orlov?* Sounds positively crooked to me.“ Jonathan says, his skepticism clearly on display.

Mom, nudging his shoulder harshly, silently mouths *„Jonathan!“*.

Just a second later, there is a click in the line. A much too cheerful voice with a thick eastern-European accent comes booming from the little speaker. *„Mrs. Byers! Ah, I have been expecting your call! Very good, very good.“*

„Uh, Mr. Orlov, is it?“

„Indeed, Mikhail Orlov, at your service.“ Will thinks the man‘s voice would sound quite impressive and bass-heavy without the phone line filtering it. He imagines a fat Russian guy with a comb-over haircut, maybe wearing a golden necklace.

„Mr. Orlov, you‘re on speaker phone. My sons are here as well.“

„Ah yes. William and Jonathan, am I not right? Listen, listen, I am very sorry for your loss. Your father was good friend of mine. Very good friend, and very good client. Every time we meet, he always tells me he has good sons in place far away. I have a glass to your father last night, and the night before.“

„Uh, hi… Thank you.“ Will mumbles, not even sure if Orlov can hear him. Jonathan gives it even less effort, just grunting in the vague direction of the phone. He shoots Will a glare that says it all: *If he was friends with their dad, he‘s up to no good.*

Visibly uncomfortable, mom leans over the desk. She speaks a tad too loudly. „The, uh, police told us my ex husband wanted us to call you about his inheritance? Which is odd, because I didn‘t think there was anything to inherit from him. When we… well, when our marriage ended, we were both pretty much broke.“

„Broke.“ Orlov laughs *„Broke he was not. He had good American car did he not? Oldsmobile 422, big engine, many horsepower, four speed. I would keep for myself if I was allowed!“*

„This is… surreal.“ Jonathan whispers in Will‘s ear. „What do you think, how many times did that guy bust dad out of jail?“

„Okay.“ their mom goes on. „The car is still in the motel parking lot. The officer told us it‘s safe there until everything‘s sorted out.“

„Good, good. Necessary documents are in mail already, I am happy to report. But there is more. There is also house here in Indianapolis. Or rather Beech Grove, very close, location full of advantage.“

For the first time, Jonathan speaks up. „Beech Grove? I know that place. Are you saying he actually bought it? I thought it was rented or something.“

„Ah, no. House was bought, fully paid for. Your father always says you do not want to move there. He says you want to sell it, and that is good. Prices are good right now.“ Orlov explains.

Will can‘t quite believe this. Even if its a cheap, run-down hell hole, it‘s still a house that would sell for several thousand Dollars. Mom seems to be thinking exactly the same. „Are you saying he‘s leaving us a house in Indiana? That‘s... I mean, that‘s great. But he was right, we‘re not going to move there.“

„I am very sorry, Mrs. Byers, but house is only for your sons.“

„Well, that‘s okay. Just... we can tell you already that no one‘s going to move to that place any time soon.“

„She‘s right.“ Will supplies. „We‘re not coming back to Indiana. I guess it‘d be best to sell it, right?“ While mom gives him an approving nod, Jonathan decidedly turns his back, signaling that he wants nothing to do with this.

„That is probably best idea. You know, there will be no better time for selling house in Beech Grove. Expert real estate agent tells me it is worth thirty grand. If you want I can take all necessary steps to sell. And do not worry, your father pays me already in full!“

At the mention of so much money, the atmosphere in the office changes immediately. Jonathan whips around, mom has to hold on to the desk, and Will almost tips over because his legs grow weak. *Thirty grand?*

„Will…“ Jonathan says in a warning tone. „I think we should-“

Quickly, *loudly*, their mom cuts in „Mr. Orlov, is it okay if I talk to my sons about this? I‘ll put you on mute for a minute.“

„Of course! Of course!“ Orlov booms. *„Take much time if you want! You are paying for long distance call anyways! I will have drink to your health in the meanwhile.“* The button only mutes the microphone, so they can hear him chuckling to himself for a while longer.

„Okay, look.“ Jonathan starts „We all know dad could have never earned that much through honest work. This is drug money, you realize that?“

„Jon, your father *never* was involved with drugs.“ mom reprimands, and Will believes her. Dealing drugs is (at least if you want to believe the movies) a dangerous business, and dad wasn‘t the type who would get himself in danger. He was far too comfortable with his beer and TV dinners for that. „I can‘t tell you how he paid for that house, but don‘t think for a second it was drugs-“

„I‘m just saying, it‘s dirty money!“ Jonathan suddenly rages. „Do what you have to do, but I don‘t want any of that. I get by on my own just fine.“

Will has always been somewhat aware of Jonathan‘s stubborn pride, but he never expected his brother would go as far as to forgo thousands of Dollars over it. „What‘s the alternative?“ he argues. „The house belongs to us if we want it or not. You‘re not saying we should just give it to someone for free.“

„No, I‘m saying you should take the money. All of it.“

„I don‘t remember raising an idiot!“ mom cuts in sharply. „So don‘t become one now, Jonathan! No matter where this money comes from, and even if it was dirty at some point, it‘s going to be clean and legal once this sale is through. And *you‘re* going to be pragmatic. Think about it, fifteen thousand for each of you!“

„Fifteen thousand...“ Will whispers to himself. That is no more than a number. Incomprehensible like the vastness of the universe. Hell, Jonathan bought his car for four hundred bucks, so what in the world could one person need that much money for?

„But he was-“ Jonathan starts, only to be cut off in an even sharper tone.

„You‘re not behaving like the adult I thought you are! Alright then, I‘ll not get in the way of whatever feud you still have with your dad, but we are selling that house, and if you don‘t want your share, my *grownup son* will have twice as much.“

Will hates being dragged into the argument like that, but he bites back his comment and lets his mom unmute the phone without interrupting.

„Mr. Orlov? We‘ve, uh... we‘ve made a decision. We‘d like to sell that house. Is there anything we have to do? Any documents to sign?“

„Ah, Mrs. Byers, yes, yes, a few signatures I will require. You will have documents by the middle of next week. And you do not worry, sale is going to be very quick, and very profitable.“

There is very little else to be done that day. Mom makes sure that Mr. Orlov definitely gets their address right, and then she is quick to hang up the phone - after all it‘s still her boss paying for the call.

Will, for his part, is left with a spinning head. *Fifteen thousand...*

Notes for the Chapter:

> Next up (hopefully) some fluff with my babies Will and Adrian.
> Also, tell me honestly... is Orlov too much of a

stereotype? I did have a good laugh writing this lol

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

> Well... I said it'd be fluff, but it's actually quite a bit more frisky than I thought.
> Still, in case this ancient promise I gave is long forgotten: There will be no smut in this AU.

Will‘s mind is as blank as the gray sky as his eyes trace tumbling leaves in the wind. A wind that also carries some light rain with it, the streaks of water on the window changing directions with the breeze. Thinking back to this time last year, Will isn‘t feeling any different. Dreary, perhaps, but that‘s just the weather. And while he‘d perhaps feel better if he‘d think about all the money that will soon be his, he avoids that.

There‘s something else that will surely cheer him up anyways, and it strikes him like a bolt of energy when he finally spots his boyfriend pedaling up the street on his bike. Adrian discards the bike on the front lawn, and that is when Will makes a beeline downstairs to swing open the door before Adrian can even knock. „Hey!“ Will grins. „You got wet.“

„No kidding.“ Adrian‘s parka is dripping, and so he drops it right by the door along with his shoes. He takes a step forward, carefully spying into the living room and the kitchen.

„Jonathan is god knows where. He‘s sort of still sulking like a child... And my mom‘s out shopping with El. You know, teaching her how to drive and stuff. Yeah, it kinda sucks when you have to teach two kids at once. One will always end up home alone.“ Will says, unable to help his devious smirk.

„Oh. Okay.“ Adrian says sheepishly. „Does that mean... your room?“

„Well, duh. Come, I‘ll make sure to warm you up.“ It feels like it‘s been ages since Will has pulled his boyfriend along like that, upstairs, into the second door to the left, with anticipation burning hot in his chest.

Adrian kicks the door shut, but then he stalls. „Just to be sure... you don‘t need, like, any more time? There‘s nothing I‘d hate more than to rush you for some selfish reason.“

This frustrates Will. He wants nothing more than to finally get at it again. He is feeling positively starved, and won‘t be able to hold back much longer. „It‘s been two whole weeks and I swear if you don‘t make out with me this instant I‘ll wrestle you down and take what I want.“

Since Adrian looks quite surprised by Will‘s immediacy, it‘s Will who has to take the first step. He closes the gap between them with force, and after the initial thrill has passed, it becomes familiar and effortless. Adrian, responsive as ever, gasps and whimpers into the kiss, and this increases when Will grabs him by the jumper and pulls him to the bed.

Now he‘s got his boyfriend exactly where he wants him; On top, because Will cherishes the reassuring feeling the weight of Adrian gives him when he‘s lying down. And luckily, Adrian has broken out of his stupor. He puts in everything he has, pinning Will down by the shoulders and assaulting his lips without leaving either of them a second to breathe.

It seems they have a lot of catching up to do, because merely kissing proves *not enough*. Will‘s fingers claw into Adrian‘s slightly wet hair to keep him perfectly in place for an attack on his sharp jaw and his neck. „Whoa...“ it escapes Adrian, his voice drifting off into a higher octave when Will finds that sweet spot below his ear that he likes to nibble on.

Both of them are running on primal instinct now - it‘s easy to get carried away like that, and Will would be lying if he said he *doesn‘t want to get carried away*. So eventually, Will can‘t help but pull on Adrian‘s jumper, and he does it with intent, so that his boyfriend is soon shirtless on top of him. Of course after that it doesn‘t take long for Will to lose his shirt as well, and this is just *so much better*.

They‘ve never gone further than this, but for now everything is okay the way it is. Certainly there is no pressure, and so Will can let himself fall into the feeling that this is just for them, that there is no one else in the world they share this level of intimacy with. „I‘ve missed this.“ Will squeals right as Adrian‘s teeth make contact with his collarbone.

Adrian sucks harshly on Will‘s skin. „Wanna make sure you‘re reminded of me every time you look in the mirror.“

Will has to laugh about this. „Right, hickeys used to be accidents, but now we‘re cultivating them.“

„Correct, and now I want one too.“

Only too happy to oblige, Will pulls his boyfriend closer, picking a place on the pale expanse of skin in front of him where he thinks a red spot would look good - then he goes to work realizing his vision of it. He knows it will take a while for it to show.

The room seems to be getting hotter and hotter, two hearts are picking up speed, breaths are getting increasingly more vocal - before everything collapses like a house of cards. „Will? Honey? We‘re back!“

Will and Adrian, as though their touches might suddenly burn each other, jump apart. Immediately Will whines „Not now! Ugh, worst possible moment!“

„Quick, put on your shirt.“ Adrian all but orders. He tries to get his jumper back on, but at some point it gets stuck, and then he‘s stumbling around the room like a chicken. Will has more luck with his T-shirt.

„Y-Yeah, I‘m here! Coming!“ he shouts through the house. Giving it a second thought, he realizes they are overreacting. His mom just came home - she won‘t immediately run upstairs and kick in his door.

„Should I hide?“ Adrian, who has finally gotten his sweater on, chuckles.

„No, dork. My hair... how does it look? Yours is okay.“

„You‘re good. God, that‘s what I call a scare.“

„You can say that again.“ Will agrees. „We‘d better go downstairs. My mom said they‘d bring chips, and I totally need something spicy now.“

„Oh, now I‘m not hot enough for you? Next time I‘ll marinade my body in tabasco.“

Will makes a point walking into the kitchen *very* casually. *No, mom, of course you didn‘t interrupt or anything.* In the beginning both mom and El are distracted anyways, too delighted to see Adrian. But once their attention turns back to Will, mom cracks a somewhat foreign grin. Will doesn‘t know what to make of it. Not until she gently tugs on the care label that‘s sticking out the front of his shirt.

Before Will, red heat rising into his cheeks, can come up with an explanation, she declares „So anyways, I‘m pretty sure you and your sister won‘t have any trouble passing your driving tests when the time comes. You did very well today, Ellie.“

„I got into a tight parking spot.“ El proudly proclaims. „Backwards.“

Will excuses himself to the bathroom to put on his shirt the right way around.

It‘s much later when Jonathan rolls in. Although mom insisted he should go back to the city and spend time with Nancy, he in turn said he‘d rather stay and help. The problem is, this is really the first time Jonathan isn‘t of any help whatsoever, and it‘s also the first time mom is truly fed up with him. They are in the living room when he makes his appearance, and this time no one asks him where he was all day.

„Hey...“ he says quietly, standing in the door with only the glow of the TV illuminating his tired face.

„Hey.“ Will returns. His voice is dry and throaty from two or more hours of not speaking, just staring at the TV. Much to his regret, Adrian couldn‘t spend the night, and his mom is too tired to talk much.

Jonathan sighs. „I‘m... I‘m sorry. I mean it.“

„Déjà-vu.“ mom notes rather coldly. „Look, I‘m too tired to talk about this now. And I‘m not in the mood either.“

But it seems like Jonathan doesn‘t have a lot to say anyways. He resigns to an armchair, face buried in his hands. And Will swears if he could come up with anything to tell his brother, he would.

Then there is El. Who doesn‘t actually like to speak all that much. Who has rarely ever exchanged more than friendly glances with Jonathan. But here she is, able to put the whole matter into words perfectly. It starts with „Can I ask you something?“

At first Jonathan just stares at her. He finds his voice after a second. „Sure... go ahead."

„You say you don't want the money because you think it's dirty. Then why do you want Will to take it?"

„Good point." Will notes. „That'd mean you want me to be immoral. At least by your standards."

„I never meant to- That's not what I wanted." Jonathan stumbles over his own hasty words.

El can be seen chewing on her lip, and it's obvious she is struggling as well. „Then is it about being grateful? That you... don't want to be grateful because your dad was a bad man?"

„That's exactly it. And I feel so... *stupid* for it. I know I'm making my own life harder. Uh, mom?"

Although mom didn't want to argue tonight, she at least shows him that she's listening. „Have you come to your senses?"

„Under one condition. And Will has to agree to that too." He blinks against the darkness, his gaze still resting on El. „I'll take the money if we divide it by three."

Notes for the Chapter:

Jonathan, you've just made an important step in getting over your daddy issues.

Also, I'm fairly sure the next chapter will be the last one of this work.

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

> Well, this took much, much longer than I wanted. But I hope I've given Lonnie a worthy ending. You know, this whole fic sort of started on the idea that most fics give us a very flat description of his relationship with his family. This was just me trying to round it off a little, with all the information I have about the characters.

With the turn of the month comes a golden fall, suddenly and without warning. One day it‘s all overcast and gray, with heavy rains and mud, the next day it‘s all orange light, dry leaves, the air quiet but biting cold. To Will this signals, finally, the end of this mess. Life is going to go back to normal now. Only one thing left to do.

Mom comes home around noon, and she smiles as she lays two little violet books on the kitchen table. They could be mistaken for notebooks if it weren‘t for the logo of the bank on the cover. She slides one over to El, the other to Will. „There you go. Your savings accounts. I don‘t have to tell you that the money will stay there until you‘re eighteen?“

Will flips his passbook open, and immediately the nausea-inducing number springs into his face. As it turns out, it‘s actually a little more than they anticipated. Eleven and a half thousand for each, Will, Jonathan and El. This is just the latest proof that somehow their luck has turned dramatically since leaving Hawkins. Jonathan, coming up from behind, rests a hand on Will‘s shoulder. „College is gonna be a breeze for you with that. But don‘t let it mess up your work ethic, you hear me?“

„Are we about ready?“ Will inquires, causing a solemn silence in the room. „I mean, I‘m ready, and they‘re probably waiting for us.“

„Yeah. I think we should go and get it over with.“ Jonathan agrees. He then adds „With all due dignity.“

They take Jonathan‘s car, him and Nancy in the front, the other three in the back. It‘s Will‘s mom who carries the urn, although it makes her visibly uncomfortable - Will doesn‘t even have the courage to ask if maybe he should take it. Quite frankly, he finds it creepy, as disrespectful as that may be.

There‘s not a lot going on in the harbor during lunchtime, at least not on the water that is lying still and deep blue before them after a ten minute drive. Adrian is already there, along with his sister and their uncle - who really does seem sober, just as promised. Still, for peace of mind, Will whispers to Adrian „He really didn‘t drink today, did he?“

„I swear.“ Adrian says. „And besides, I‘ll take us out, and Melissa will take us back. He‘s just here because it‘s, like, a legal requirement, or we‘d have to use a rowboat or something.“

Despite the reassurance, Will remains suspicious of Adrian‘s uncle Kurt. It‘s rare that he knows someone for over a year without being able to figure out whether or not to like them - Kurt drinks, and more than anyone should. Alcohol brings out the worst in him. But the rest of the time he is civil and quite likable, even apologetic about his drunken outbursts. Stepping back to the little group, Will overhears the conversation between his mom and Kurt. „You sure it‘s alright to have all of us here? God knows this is a private matter.“

„No, it‘s perfectly alright. As long as we all fit in the boat?“

„No worries there.“ Kurt assures her. „We‘re below maximum capacity. Uh, we ready?“

One after the other, they climb aboard the modestly sized fishing boat. That turns out not as easy as one would think, even with the water in the bay all calm and flat. Will, not being used to the way a boat moves, almost trips over, but Adrian catches him before he can go overboard. „Are you gonna be okay?“

„It‘s not gonna be too rough out there, is it?“ Will gives a nervous chuckle. He‘s not quite comfortable at sea, unlike Adrian and Melissa who have gone out fishing with their uncle many times.

„Don‘t worry about the waves. It‘s the cold that kills during this time of year. So turn up your collar, alright?“

Will is already shivering, so all he can do is hope they make it quick. At least there is little traffic in the bay, and really, Will forgets all about the cold once he‘s seated on the bench with a good view of Adrian preparing to steer the boat. Kurt is right there next to him, but he lets Adrian handle things on his own, only correcting the course a little from time to time. With the motor roaring loudly, they leave the bay, dragging a long white wake that marks their path.

„We‘re not going too far out, are we?“ mom shouts over the sound of the engine.

„Nah, just about three miles.“ Kurt answers in his usual booming voice that just can not be drowned out by a boat motor. „It‘d be perfectly legal to do this in the bay, but... y‘know, kinda inconsiderate if you ask me.“

Mom grips the urn tighter, and she grimaces. „And a bit undignified.“

„Right. Anyways, we‘re going about halfway to Fisher‘s Island, and you won‘t lose sight of the shore.“

Once the boat is really moving at speed, Will finds himself getting more comfortable. No actual waves, no apparent danger, just wind and blistering cold Atlantic air. „That‘s kinda cool isn‘t it?“ Jonathan says. He points at Adrian behind the wheel. „Ever thought about learning to drive a boat?“

„Not really. But I‘m pretty sure he‘ll want to teach me before long. And... it‘s not like it scares me or anything, I just like having solid ground under my feet. I guess I‘ll go along with it if he asks me, though.“

„I like it here.“ Nancy chimes in. She has pulled her scarf tight, still she is hugging herself against the crackling air. She looks quite glad to be here, though. „It‘s... I don‘t know, easy to breathe I suppose.“

El agrees with this. „The bigger the place, the better. And no walls is the best of all.“ That is of course her claustrophobia speaking, and Nancy pulls the younger girl close.

For a few minutes no one talks, then Adrian loudly proclaims „We‘re about there. I guess we can-“ He looks at his uncle for reassurance, who nods. „Okay. We can do it here.“ Him killing the motor comes unexpected, and the silence that follows is odd.

Probably because she realizes that no one else is going to say anything, Will‘s mom sighs „Jonathan... I think you should.“

„Really? I thought you‘d want to, I mean, I can... If you insist. Just please don‘t make me give a speech. I wouldn‘t know what to say.“

Mom carefully hands him the urn, which Jonathan takes with shaking hands. „It‘s okay, you don‘t have to. Maybe I could.“ At everyone‘s expectant gaze, she clears her throat. Then she speaks slowly, careful to find the right words. „I hadn‘t seen Lonnie for three years when he suddenly showed up on our doorstep. And I know you might not understand, but that day he looked a lot more like the man I married than he had in a long time. There‘s good memories and there‘s bad memories, but that‘s life, I suppose, and these last weeks might have... mellowed the bad ones. At least for me. For one final time he reminded me of how it all started, back when I was seventeen. I remember we took ourselves very seriously. We knew for a fact we could take anything life may throw at us.“ She leans over to affectionately put a hand on Jonathan‘s knee. „Two years later we weren‘t so sure anymore. I‘m not going to talk about how or when it went sour, because it doesn‘t matter anymore. And despite the way our time together ended, I would‘ve wished Lonnie more luck. I know he wanted to see more of the world than just Indiana at some point, even though he hardly ever spoke of such things. And... that‘s why we‘re here.“

They all have to let this sink for a while. The only sound comes from the small waves splashing softly against the boat, rocking it up and down. But eventually, Jonathan straightens his back. „I think it‘s time. I‘ll just-“ His fine motor skills leave him for a second or two when he tries to get the lid off the urn. Because Will is sitting right next to his brother, he is probably the only one who hears the whispered „So long, dad...“ as Jonathan begins to slowly pour the ashes into the ocean.

This takes a long time, but it feels a lot more dignified than just dumping the entire urn. In the beginning Will is worried that the ashes might be blown back in their faces by a breeze, but Jonathan keeps it close to the waterline, and they‘re fine in the end. Once nothing is left, Jonathan closes the urn up again, then he drops it into the water. „Not really a... ceremony.“ he utters.

„He wouldn‘t have been comfortable with anything more.“ mom reassures. „I think we should head back home now. It‘s really getting cold.“

This is Adrian‘s cue to switch places with his sister, who fires the engine back up under the watch of her uncle. The sound of it comes suddenly, and like nothing else it signifies the finale. Will knows they won‘t talk a lot about this day in the years to come. There is little to talk about anyways, just things that might drag them down. Will, for his part, is going to take his dad as an example for how bad luck can come around and end things in an instant - and he imagines it would suck to die with so many regrets nagging on you.

„What are you thinking about?“ Adrian asks him, speaking directly into his ear.

„Hmm...“ Will shrugs. „Just... Maybe you could sleep over tonight? Y‘know, that‘s something we usually don‘t regret.“

Notes for the Chapter:

> This AU is definitely not over. I can't stress this enough. <3